



OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Education and Labor

Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Opening Statement of Chair Bonamici (OR-01)

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment

The History and Continued Contributions of Tribal Colleges and Universities

Tuesday, July 19, 2022 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and to the witnesses for being here this morning. Today we are meeting to discuss the unique history and value of Tribal Colleges and Universities, or TCUs. This is our third hearing this Congress to examine institutions that are critical to serving historically underserved students.

Tribal Colleges and Universities were founded, in part, to help combat cultural erasure after the systematic decimation of Native communities. These communities have been deeply marked by historical trauma, stemming—in part—from the use of education as a tool of government-forced assimilation. TCUs now play a critical role in protecting and preserving culture and traditions. They also provide support to Native American students to help them succeed and meaningfully contribute to the self-governance of their Nations.

Today, there are 35 accredited TCUs serving more than 27,000 students representing more than 250 federally recognized tribes.

Each of these 35 institutions plays a critical role in the education of Native students by providing an affordable, culturally-based education and a supportive learning environment. In addition, these institutions often provide essential resources to the communities in which they are located.

Northwest Indian College, a two-year TCU in Bellingham, Washington is the only tribal college in the Pacific Northwest and serves students from Washington, Idaho, and my home state of Oregon. NWIC offers a number of bachelor's and associate's degree programs that illustrate the unique nature of TCUs. A few examples of these programs include Native Studies Leadership, Tribal Governance and Business Management, and Early Childhood Education. NWIC also has a number of activities, organizations, and support networks on campus intended to help students succeed and feel at home on campus.

Beyond providing a culturally-based education and fostering a sense of belonging, TCUs strive to help Native students complete their education by taking steps to meet basic needs and reducing financial barriers. And the need is great.

A survey of several TCUs in 2019 found that 80 percent of their students experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness. To help address these barriers to completion, TCUs have built successful in-house programs to support the basic needs of their students.

Although they have an important role, TCUs often lack resources because they do not have the same access to funding from state and local governments as other colleges and universities.

As a result, TCUs are chronically underfunded and face limitations on their institutional capacity to support the students they serve.

For example, it is not uncommon for a professor to also be an advisor, administrator, and source of technical support as part of their day-to-day duties.

Despite these challenges, these institutions are resilient. They implement innovative programming and solutions to keep costs down and support their students. To bolster these efforts and improve student outcomes, we must increase federal support for TCUs.

House Democrats delivered unprecedented funding to help TCUs endure the disproportionate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Native communities.

Through three COVID relief bills, including the American Rescue Plan, Congress delivered \$367 million in targeted funding to TCUs. These funds helped prevent students from experiencing homelessness, hunger, and other hardships, and provided institutions with resources to protect the health and safety of campus communities during the pandemic.

Although these bills provided desperately needed aid to students and institutions, we know TCUs need sustained and enhanced investments if they are to continue their legacy of helping fulfill the promise of higher education.

I look forward to learning more from today's witnesses about the successes of TCUs, the challenges they face, and how Congress can deliver the support these vital institutions need to continue to provide a high-quality, affordable education for generations to come.

I want to thank our distinguished witnesses again for being with us today and I am happy to yield to the new Ranking Member, Ms. Miller Meeks, for her opening statement.